

GUIDELINES

DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

Responsibility of: School Support Services
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Target Audience: Corporate and School Staff, Parents and Community

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This document should be read in conjunction with the:

- [Students with Disability guidelines](#)
- [Diagnostic Assessment guidelines](#)
- [Enrolment in Special Schools and Special Centres guidelines](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

When a school identifies a student experiencing problems that are significantly outside developmental or educational expectations, and the student has not responded to targeted interventions, a referral to an external practitioner may be warranted to clarify whether the student's performance might be explained by the child having a disorder or disability.

These guidelines:

- set parameters to ensure schools uphold procedures for engaging external practitioners to assess and support students with disability.
- provide a framework for procuring external practitioners.
- establish minimum standards for assessment and support services that align with legislative requirements, professional standards and departmental policy.

2. DEFINITIONS

Disability, in relation to a person, means:

- (a) total or partial loss of a person's bodily or mental functions, or
- (b) total or partial loss of a part of the body, or
- (c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness, or
- (d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness, or
- (e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body, or
- (f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction, or
- (g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment, or that results in disturbed behaviour;

and includes disability that:

- (h) presently exists, or
- (i) previously existed but no longer exists, or
- (j) may exist in the future, or
- (k) is imputed to a person.

([Disability Standards for Education 2005](#))¹; ([Disability Discrimination Act, 1992](#))

External practitioners are individuals or organisations (either government or private), external to the education department, that provide additional and specialist support to complement school programs and services. External practitioners include but are not limited to psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and paediatricians.

Parent

Parent, for the purpose of this document, includes

- the child's father, mother or any other person who has parental responsibility for the child and also for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child includes a person who is regarded as a parent under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander customary law or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tradition;
- a guardian/caregiver and is a person who has parental responsibility for a child or daily care and control of a child, is the person with whom a child currently resides, or is a person caring for the child at any given time.

According to the **Education Act (sections 7 & 8)** a person has parental responsibility for a child if the person has daily care and control of the child (i.e. is entitled to exercise all the powers, rights and responsibilities in relation to the day-to-day care and control of the child) or is entitled to exercise all the powers, rights and responsibilities in relation to the long-term care and development of the child, or both.

The Standards

[Disability Standards for Education 2005](#) : 'The [Standards](#) seek to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.'²

School refers to all education providers in the Northern Territory including Northern Territory Government schools, Independent Public Schools, long day care and preschool facilities.

The **Senior School Psychologist** is the team leader and supervisor for psychologists within the department's Student Support division.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Executive Directors and Regional Directors* are responsible for:

- ensuring schools engage external practitioners in line with these guidelines.
- enabling the review, monitoring and evaluation of the regional implementation of these guidelines to ensure departmental practices are consistent and in the best interest of the student.

* Executive Director School Support Services takeS the role of Executive Directors (North and South) and Regional Directors for the schools that they directly line manage.

School Support Services is responsible for:

- setting Northern Territory-wide standards for school engagement with external practitioners for students with disability.

¹ [Disability Standards for Education](#). *Disability Standards for Education*. Web. 9 Feb. 2015. <https://education.gov.au/disability-standards-education>

² Fact Sheet 2: Disability Standards for Education 2005. *Fact Sheet 2: Disability Standards for Education 2005*. Web. 9 Feb. 2015. <http://docs.education.gov.au/node/35943>

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- communicating and liaising with external practitioners employed by Northern Territory Government schools.
- ensuring the Senior School Psychologist provides guidance to school principals throughout the procurement process.

Student Support (regions) is responsible for:

- assisting schools with strategies and recommendations related to assessments and reports.
- collaborating with School Support Services regarding the provision of professional learning for teachers and special education teachers, in relation to diagnosing/identifying disability in students and the provision of support for such students.

The Principal is responsible for:

- distributing guidelines to external practitioners during the procurement process to ensure they are aware of their roles and responsibilities.
- confirming the external practitioners have the necessary qualifications and experience, as specified in the guidelines.
- liaising with the Senior School Psychologist throughout the procurement process.

External Practitioners are responsible for:

- ensuring services are carried out in accordance with the Students with Disability policy and supporting guidelines.
- providing schools with reports/recommendations that meet the appropriate standards set by the department, as specified in the guidelines.
- adhering to the standards set by their relevant professional body.

4. GUIDELINES

4.1 Qualifications and experience

The department considers the following to be the minimum standards of qualifications and experience that an external practitioner should possess when working in Northern Territory schools:

- registration or eligibility for membership with a national health professional body/board (e.g. Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA); [Psychology Board of Australia](#); Speech [Pathology Australia \(SPA\)](#)).
- experience working in a school setting relevant to the local context.
- experience working in the area of disability.
- experience conducting appropriate assessments.
- experience working with multicultural clients or those with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D).
- acknowledgement that he/she has read the professional guidelines relevant to his/her profession; for example, the following Australian Psychological Society (APS) guidelines:
 - [APS guidelines for working with young people \(2007\)](#)
 - [APS guidelines for psychological assessment and use of psychological tests \(2009\)](#)
 - APS Practice guide for the assessment of school aged students in educational contexts (2014).

Assessments must be conducted only when there is clear knowledge and understanding of how to administer, score, interpret and report outcomes resulting from the specific assessment tool being used. External practitioners are required to use their own assessment resources including

test kits, manuals, scoring sheets, response booklets and/or the most recent version of the assessment.

4.2 Procurement

There is an inherent risk in employing external practitioners who do not provide evidence of the above multicultural competencies in a local school context. The procurement process requires consideration of utilising Northern Territory businesses before seeking businesses from interstate. There is a mandatory allocation of a 20% weighting for the selection criteria around supporting local development and value-adding to the capacity of the business that is selected. Assistance in sourcing local businesses can be obtained by contacting the Industry Capability Network Northern Territory ([ICN NT](#)). ICN NT is also the approving authority for procurement of goods or services using interstate or international businesses.

Principals should liaise with the Senior School Psychologist Student Support throughout the procurement process.

The [External Practitioner Checklist For Principals](#) provides assistance in the procurement/employment of external practitioners.

The [Allied Health Practitioner Agreement Of Service](#) should be used in conjunction with the checklist to ensure common understanding for service provision.

4.3 Standards for service provision

a) Disability Standards for Education

All external practitioners employed in a school are to complete the department's online [Disability Standards for Education Course](#) which on average takes two hours to complete. This professional e-learning course outlines the obligations of education providers under the [Disability Standards for Education 2005](#) to ensure equal opportunities are provided to students with disability.

b) Working with Children Clearance Notice (Ochre Card)

Prior to commencement of employment in a school, all external practitioners are required to provide evidence of holding a current Working with Children Clearance Notice (Ochre card) to the Principal as per the [Working with Children Clearance Notices \(Ochre Cards\)](#) policy and procedures.

c) Professional indemnity insurance

Prior to commencement, external practitioners employed in a school setting must provide evidence that they are covered by professional indemnity insurance. to the school Principal; as stated in Section 129 of the [Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009](#):

- (1) *A registered health practitioner must not practice the health profession in which the practitioner is registered unless appropriate professional indemnity insurance arrangements are in force in relation to the practitioner's practice of the profession.*

d) Supervision when working in NT schools

External practitioners employed by schools will also be required to liaise with the Senior School Psychologist, relevant Senior Advisor or Consultant, and Regional Managers within Student Support.

e) Conflict of interest

External practitioners engaged in employment in both schools and independent private practice must inform the Principal of their dual roles. It is the responsibility of external practitioners to ensure they follow their health professional body/board's code of ethics and apply professional judgment in response to possible conflicts of interest. The dual roles must remain clearly separated by ensuring the following:

- there is no advertisement or referral to the independent private practice in the school setting.
- materials and resources from the school must not be used in independent private practice.
- independent private practice services must not be provided during the hours that the external practitioners are employed to work at the school.
- any possible conflicts of interest or issues surrounding dual roles should be discussed with the Senior School Psychologist.

f) Informed consent

Prior to providing support and carrying out an assessment of a student, an external practitioner must obtain a signed [Parent Consent Authority](#) and also contact the student's parent to gain verbal consent prior to carrying out each specific assessment.

This is to ensure that the parent has an understanding of the assessment used, the process, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality limitations, and knowledge of who will receive or have access to the final report. Gaining the informed consent of the student also assists with building rapport and a trusting relationship.

g) Assessment reports

Psychological assessment reports need to state a diagnosis that fulfills all the criteria within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5) or the International Code of Disorders Tenth Edition (ICD-10).

Assessment reports may vary in structure, style and format. The use of section sub-headings are recommended to provide structure. Reports should always be written in clear and simple language with minimal professional or technical jargon and should not contain ambiguous statements that are difficult to understand.

The minimum standard of information to be obtained and incorporated into an assessment report is available in the following document: [Recommended Structure of a Report by an External Practitioner](#).

External practitioners must provide feedback on the report to the appropriate people such as the student's parents/caregivers and the school. If possible, feedback should take place in person to ensure understanding and clarity regarding the report, to allow opportunities for questions in a supportive environment, and to provide an opportunity for discussion of the recommendations and strategies that may be useful for the student.

Assessment reports that do not meet the minimum standards specified in the guidelines will not be accepted by the department.

h) Follow up assessment

Follow up assessments, or evidence, are used as part of the Special Education Support Program for students with disability that are scheduled for a funding review. In the event that a follow up assessment carried out by an external practitioner does not support the current diagnosis, the review will be based on the most current assessment. If the diagnosis is not confirmed, the

student may not receive funding as part of the Special Education Support Program and the school will need to liaise with regional Student Support regarding continuing support.

i) Record management

The school is responsible for maintaining appropriate records and documentation relating to the procurement of an external practitioner, as outlined in the [External Practitioner Checklist For Principals](#).

Student Assessment reports are to be submitted to the student's departmental case manager who will file them electronically on TRIM. If there are copyright restrictions preventing copying or scanning the report, it will be placed on a hard copy file that is linked to the student's electronic TRIM file.

5. INDIGENOUS CONTEXT

When a school is engaging an external practitioner to work in a remote school and/or with Indigenous students, the principal must review the practitioner's curriculum vitae and conduct an interview addressing the provider's experience, knowledge and understanding of Indigenous context.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the following DA-Appendix A: Key Principles for Working with Indigenous Students and the supporting documents around understanding and working within the Indigenous context:

- [General Principles of Practice and Cultural Competence](#)

6. EXTERNAL PRACTITIONER REVIEW

Compliance with these guidelines by external practitioners will ensure diagnoses, reports and recommendations adequately inform ongoing support and program design for students with disability. Documentation/evidence will not be accepted as sufficient if providers are not compliant with the requirements stated in these guidelines.

Evidence presented prior to the implementation of these guidelines may be reviewed, and additional documentation required, for the ongoing provision of student support to best meet the needs of an individual.

7. APPENDICES

[DA-Appendix A: Key Principles for Working with Indigenous Students](#)

8. LIST OF SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- [Allied Health Practitioner Agreement of Service](#)
- [External Practitioner Checklist for Principals](#)
- [General Principles of Practice and Cultural Competence](#)
- [Recommended Structure of a Report by an External Practitioner](#)